

arts & culture

Star Wars Fans Say Shanty Show Is Out of This World

A new show recently landed in The Villages, leaving a theater full of delighted Star Wars fans in its wake.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND
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As sci-fi and fantasy enthusiasts from throughout the country gathered in Atlanta for Dragon Con, The Villages held its own convention Friday at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Patrons came to see “Star Shanties: Songs From a Galaxy Far, Far Away,” winner of the 2022 Orlando Fringe Critics’ Choice Award for Best Musical at the Orlando Fringe Festival, and to participate in the Q&A event after the show.

“This began as an afternoon of boredom spent during the pandemic,” writer-director Arthur Rowan said. “It was during the time that sea shanties were huge on TikTok, and I decided to throw this thing together.”

Rowan teamed up with Ashley Willsey, producer of 2014’s Fringe hit “Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson,” to create this addition to George Lucas’ universe of Wookiees, starships, lightsabers and Jedi.

In “Star Shanties,” The Wretched Hive — “a 100% legitimate cargo ship” — and her crew are stranded in the Outer Rim. In desperate need of credits to repair the damaged ship, the starfarers have no choice but to sing their favorite shanties to entertain the residents of the “Del Sol System,” home to a “planet full of villages with plenty of parking for landspeeders.”

“Star Shanties” features an entirely original cast of characters, but longtime Star Wars fans will likely recognize a few familiar archetypes.

The production stars Taylor Harrell as Barrett, a brooding ex-Imperial Army soldier, Studio actor Mark Miller as the seasoned Captain Vale, Charles Stevens as co-captain Rafe, Meg Stefanowicz as former Rebel fighter Mynoc and Ryan J. Lynch as the affable Jander.

“Jander is the heart of the Wretched Hive, and it’s a delight stepping into his boots,” Lynch said. “He has a strong moral compass, and his excitability is matched by the passion he holds for the things he loves. He can and will talk your ear off about shanties.”

Despite minimalistic costumes and set design, the production is rich with references to some of the galaxy’s

most famous characters and events. It fills in the gaps that many of the existing Star Wars stories do not, giving voice to the civilians and denizens of the Star Wars universe.

One of the best examples of this is “Ghosts,” led by Jander. The shanty is an ode to Alderaan, Princess Leia’s home planet, and among the first to fall to the destructive power of the first Death Star. It’s the show’s most poignant song and the most popular.

During the Q&A, members of the cast and audience talked about their favorite songs, characters, movies and moments from Star Wars. Rowan also spoke about the inspiration behind each of the shanties and how they were created.

“For ‘Ghosts of Alderaan’ ... I ended up starting from ‘The Parting Glass’ — an Irish farewell song,” Rowan said. “It occurred to me that if I was going to write a song about a terrible oppressive empire, it made sense to make it Irish.”

The prospect of an entire show filled with shanties may seem daunting, but at just under an hour with the Q&A included, The Wretched Hive doesn’t overstay its welcome. In fact, many members of the audience wished the show were longer.

“I would come to see it if they added more,” said Chris Wile, a Village of Sabal Chase resident.



Featuring an original cast of characters, “Star Shanties: Songs From a Galaxy Far, Far Away” made its debut in The Villages on Friday at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Chris came to the show with her husband, Bob, who was one of the graphic designers for the original Star Wars toy line. He said Stefanowicz’s performance as Mynoc was his favorite part of the show, as were her raspy vocals.

“She had a great voice,” he said. “Very unique.”

After the Q&A, the remaining members of the audience congregated in The Sharon’s lobby to take photos with the cast, buy merchandise and continue discussing their love of Star Wars with fellow fans.

Among them were several members of The Villages Astronomy Club, including club president Mark Graybill, his wife, Toni, and Linda and



Praised by audiences for his portrayal of Herr Schultz in The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol’s production of “Cabaret,” Mark Miller returned to The Villages as Captain Vale in “Star Shanties: Songs From a Galaxy Far, Far Away” at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Dave Meng. When not sharing their love of the stars with the rest of The Villages, the group moonlights as smugglers in a Star Wars roleplaying game set in the Outer Rim.

Linda, of the Village of Marsh Bend, enjoyed how unabashedly geeky the show was and Mark, of the Village of Liberty Park, liked the inclusion of expanded universe characters like Grand Admiral Thrawn.

“It’s a great show, even if you’ve only seen a movie or two,” Mark said. “They introduced what’s going on well-enough that if you haven’t seen many of the movies or shows, you’re still going to be able to enjoy it. I think they could easily flesh it out to a full show.”

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